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ON THE CULTIVATION AND PATRONAGE OF ART.

LETTER FIRST.

[From *Blackwood's Magazine*, 1891.]

SIR,—The Fine Arts are, unquestionably, among the sources of happiness which it was the gracious intention of Providence that man should possess; and therefore we are bound to believe that, as genius is one of the most precious gifts of Heaven, it is a duty religiously incumbent on those to whom it has been imparted, or who are entrusted with its early direction, to see that the divine present be neither lost by a total neglect of timely cultivation, nor wasted by the misapplication of its wonderful powers. As the opinions of men of high reputation in the Arts on this important subject, must be allowed to have great weight, perhaps what I have now to communicate may not be unworthy of attention.

It is my good fortune, Mr. Editor, to have a son who has been thus favored, being possessed of talents, which, if carefully cultivated, would, I have no doubt, ensure to him a name among the most distinguished artists of his, or, I will not scruple to say, of any other country. Under this conviction, and urged by the entreaties of my dear boy, I lately applied to an artist of eminence to request the favor of his advice, as to the most prudent mode of proceeding, so as to make sure of the accomplishment of my hopes. Having explained to him the purpose of my visit, I produced several specimens of my son's abilities in drawing, in painting, and also, in order to show the strength and fertility of his imagination, several attempts in original composition. He appeared to be much pleased; acknowledged they contained incontestable evidence of very superior endowments, and entirely concurred with me in thinking, that, with due cultivation, aided, as he expressed it, "with such advantages as were necessary to their complete development and full effect," the result must be honorable to himself and his country.

Delighted and encouraged with the favorable issue of this examination, I took the liberty to request the obliging professor to tell me briefly what course he would advise us to take, and particularly what should be our first steps, that future success might not be endangered by an injudicious commencement. "That I will do," said he, "with pleasure, and I account myself fortunate in the opportunity you afford me to be useful to you and your ingenious son, in a concern of so much importance. Much," continued he, "depends on early impressions: let him therefore have the benefit of the best advice at his outset; for by which, not only much good will be done, but much harm prevented. I trust the young gentleman has been liberally educated?"

"Sir," said I, "most liberally. In his education no expense or trouble has been spared on my part, in application on his. He is familiar with ancient literature, and Homer is his idol." "You have done well, Sir," said he, "in storing his mind with the treasures of ancient lore; let him not be deficient in the languages of the living; for in the prosecution of his professional studies, he will have much occasion for the information they contain, as well as the means they afford of general communication." I assured him that these had not been neglected; and whatever could be done to improve my son yet more in that species of knowledge, should certainly not be omitted.

Continuing the thread of his instructions, he said, "Be mindful, as I observed before, that no time be lost in placing the youth under a master of high professional reputation; one who shall be not less distinguished for his genius and good taste, than a sound understanding; for then he will have at once the important advantages of wise instruction, practically illustrated by the best examples of modern art, at a time when they will be most efficacious. During the early period of his studies, he will de-

rive great and lasting benefits from his access to the schools of the Royal Academy. In that noble Institution he will have an opportunity to copy the finest remains of ancient sculpture; he will have the same facilities in the study of the human body, from choice examples of living nature; he will hear the lectures of the several Professors on painting, sculpture, and architecture; and in the library of that establishment, he will find books and prints of great value, whence he will collect a fund of useful and interesting information on a variety of subjects connected with his main object. No doubt," added he, "you intend your son shall pursue the art in its highest department—that of historical painting?" "Certainly," I replied, "I wish him—and it is also his ambition, presumptuous as it may seem, to be the rival of Michael Angelo, and of Raphael; and if there should be others yet more eminent, those, I trust, it will be his endeavor to equal, and, if possible, to excel." "Such desires," said he, "are no evidences of presumption; they are natural, and what is more, they are wise. Whoever does not propose to attain the summit of Parnassus, will never reach the mid-way. It would be cruel in fortune not to reward as richly as they deserve, talents so promising, and ambition so laudable. The Royal Establishment, Sir, which I mentioned, confers honorary tokens—medals of gold and silver, upon its meritorious students: these your son will doubtless receive; they will be a gratifying earnest of his final success; they will be gratifying also to you, and moreover be a passport into the world: the public will be prepared to approve the more mature works of a genius which, in its early career, had been honored by those who were best able to discover and appreciate its claims. Advancing in his academical studies, another source of improvement offers in the Greek marbles of the National Museum, in which he will find rare examples of beautiful form and beautiful composition, in the purest taste. Those wonderful fragments seem to have been preserved expressly for the regeneration of Art. The world has nothing in sculpture of equal value.

"We will now suppose your son to have completed his academical labors; completed also the stipulated period of tuition under the direction of a master, and to have arrived at the commencement of a new course of study, in which, I conclude, you are prepared to support him.—I mean his travels on the Continent, in order to behold with his own eyes those wonders of genius, which he has hitherto only heard of in the reports of artists, or faintly seen in wretched imitations." "It is my determination, Sir," I replied, "not to subject myself to the reproach of having withheld anything that I can command, that shall be recommended by you, as either useful or necessary to the honorable termination of our united endeavors: for I consider myself as embarked in the same vessel with my son; at the same time, I confess I was not prepared to expect such an addition to expenses, which, even without it, almost alarm me with their probable amount. But, Sir, if travel be necessary, my son shall certainly be enabled to go wherever instruction may be found."

"Sir," said he, "the grandeur of the mountain scenery cannot be conceived by those who have not beheld it with their own eyes. The vast expanse of the ocean produces an effect on the mind of the actual observer which mocks all the powers of description. Equally inconceivable are the mighty productions of Italian genius in times past; and to comprehend truly what is there shown to be within the grasp of human capacity, nothing short of ocular evidence will suffice. It is possible to believe what is extraordinary without sensible proof, but such credulity has nothing of the life of conviction; and besides, it is the sight, not the report of great works,

by which we are at once animated and instructed; your son, Sir, must go and view the stupendous labors of Michael Angelo, in the Sistine Chapel; he must actually behold the enchantments of the Vatican, and indeed, all that the Imperial city contains of the divine Raphael, and especially that miracle of Art, and last of his labors on earth, the Transfiguration.

"At Rome, your enraptured son will revel in the luxuries of Art; he will quaff the beverage of inspiration, and lave his faculties in the purest waters of genius, issuing from innumerable fountains. Although the Pontifical City will be the chief, it will not be his only school. Naples is rich in Art; but in the romantic, the grand, and beautiful scenery of nature, it is, with its surrounding vicinity, a region of wonders. Florence contains many a gem of 'purest ray serene'; the constellation of Bologna must not be viewed by him with a careless eye; the miracles of Correggio at Parma, prove that he was indeed 'also a painter,' though placed side by side with the most divine of artists. At Mantua he will be ravished with the pencil of the energetic Giulio; and at Venice, the glorious works of Titian, Tintoretto, and Paul Veronese, will at once captivate and astonish him. Day after day, month after month, he will dwell on the gorgeous scene; for there alone he will see the energetic and grand in composition, combined with all that is beautiful and splendid in color, or powerful and harmonious in light and shade.

"On quitting Italy, the university of art, he will not hasten directly to his native land, but visit the wealth of genius treasured up in many a continental city. Germany can boast of numerous collections that must not be passed unexamined. Belgium, too, may be proud of its Rembrandt and Rubens, whose extraordinary productions claim the admiration of the world. From both of those artists, the judicious student will derive much; and his taste having been purified in higher schools, he will know at once how to separate what is of an exquisite quality from what is base, and leave those great but dangerous examples, enriched by their beauties, and, at the same time, untainted by their faults.

"Arrived at length in the bosom of his much-loved country, he presents himself before a delighted parent, full of gratitude for the innumerable benefits which he has received through his means, and eager to prove that the affection he had experienced, had not been unworthily placed."

Here the artist paused; having, as he conceived, fully complied with my request. I therefore expressed my acknowledgments for his great kindness, and added, that I hoped, and indeed confidently trusted, he would have the satisfaction of witnessing the excellence of his instructions in the example of my dear son, who should certainly follow them to the very letter.

"But lest I might by any unfortunate accident," I added, "be deprived of an opportunity of consulting you on his return from the Continent, I entreat that you will further oblige me with your directions as to what steps will be most proper for him to take at his entrance into the world; being, it must not be forgotten, henceforth destined to subsist by the honorable employment of the talents with which Heaven has blessed him."

"Sir," said the venerable artist, "I have lived long, and I know much of Art, of artists, and what is more, of the state of public feeling towards both. By this knowledge and experience I am happily enabled to give a decided answer to your question, which, relying on your good sense and paternal affection, I am sure will be satisfactory. You are fully sensible of its importance, and therefore, I request your serious attention." I assured him, that, deeply impressed as I was, with the kind interest which he took in my concerns, and convinced of the value of his counsel, it was impossible I should be either inattentive or ungrateful. "In the

voyage of life," I added, "our vessel should not only be well prepared, but well conducted, and also our embarkation well timed; you, Sir, who know all the requisites of equipment, know also exactly how to choose the fortunate moment of commencement, the true course, and all that may be hoped and feared in that perilous navigation." "My counsel," said he, "be assured, shall not fail you. Listen, Sir, I beseech you. Far to the south, where the great Peninsula of Africa projects its lofty cape into the ocean, at some distance in the interior, the provident care of government has assigned an extensive tract of beautiful and fertile land, expressly for the use of citizens under particular circumstances. To that far region let your ingenious son, when his studies in art shall be completed, transport himself; there let him dig—the earth, equally grateful and generous, will liberally reward his talents and his toil: a return which neither will rouse from the soil on which he was born, with no better implement of cultivation than his pencil. There, I say, let him dig; there he may get wealth, and honor, and furthermore, he may be the happy parent of sons no less happy than their father, because they will neither be tempted by an unfortunate ambition to solicit the rewards due to merit, by occupations for which they may have no talents, nor by excellent talents, for which they will find no occupation."

My venerable counsellor now concluded; and being suddenly called away on other business, he apologized and left me to meditate on the "decided answer" he had given to my last question. How far I thought it prudent to be regulated by his advice, I shall take an early opportunity to inform you.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
A. Z.

SCRAPS ABOUT WILKIE.—Wilkie was a silent though stirring child, and loved, when scarce escaped from his mother's bosom, to draw such sketches as struck his young fancy on the sand by the stream side, on the smooth stones of the field, on the floors of the manse; it was thus observed that most of these early scratchings had a leaning towards the humorous and the absurd. He has been heard, when his fame was high, to declare that he could draw before he could read, and paint before he could spell; nor is it forgotten that he was seen, when a mere child, to sketch a female head with chalk upon the floor; and, on being questioned what he was doing, he answered, "Making bonnie Lady Gonic;" and that the rude outline contained something of the lineaments of Lady Balmglen, whom he had but newly seen at his father's fireside.

But he was no lover of studies such as the master admired: his heart, he knew not why, took no concern either in lessons of grammar, or questions of arithmetic, but wandered unconsciously, as he has been heard to declare, away to the unbidden realms of Art.

What he could be doing while stooping behind the desk, with a group of boys and girls crowding about him, was soon discovered by the master, and brought but a gentle rebuke for turning the school into an academy of art, and drawing heads on his slate instead of working questions in Hutton or Dilworth. Of these school-boy portraits I once inquired of one of the sisters, "If they were like?" "O, like! at least they were like," he said. This school-companion knew him as "weo sunny-haired Davie," but was not aware of his eminence in Art. When I related this conversation to Sir David, he smiled and said, "I remember it all well: it happened at Pitlessie school; and when I went to the school of Kettle, my reputation had gone before me, and I got no rest till I had drawn—sometimes with pencil, frequently with ink—most of the heads in the school; but you may be sure that they were

rude things." Some of these very early groupings in Art are still preserved by his school-companions. When he grew into reputation with his bare-footed comrades, he set a value, it is said, on his drawings, and levied the reward of a pencil, or a marble, or a pen, from all whom he did not sketch of free will. Others remember him, while at school, as careless of dress, fond of drollery, and loving play better than his lesson. "I mind him well," said an old man from the banks of Eden-water; "and I mind his brothers too; but he was a quieter, kinder lad than his elder brothers; and liked better to stand and look on at his companions at their games than join in their play. I think I see him now standing smiling; y' his hands in his pouches! Ay, but he liked best to lie a group on the ground with his slate and pencil, making queer drawings!"

But, though his heart was set on Art, he inherited the mechanical turn of mind peculiar to his race. This was visible on many occasions. With no better tools than a knife and a chisel, he constructed miniature wind and water mills, frames for winnowing corn, common suction pumps, and carriages for labor and for pleasure: nor did he seem averse to learn the craft of shoemaking, and the trade of weaving; and he is said to have excelled in handling the fore hammer in the village forge. He has been heard to describe with much accuracy the peculiar position of the shoemaker, when, having passed the bristled points of his thread through the hole made by the awl, he sets his feet out, presses closer his knees, and with compressed lips and bared elbows, pulls the waxen hemp home with a jerk. And he, evidently in the nod of the weaver's head, the swing of his body, and the very sound which the sley emitted when the treddles moved, and the shuttle delivered its thread to the warp.—*Life of Wilkie.*

As we are interested in the landscape features of the earth, we are also glad to have information about the like features in other parts of the universe.

Dr. Scoresby, in an account that he has given of some recent observation made with the Earl of Rosse's telescope, says:—"With respect to the moon, every object on its surface of one hundred feet was now distinctly to be seen; and he had no doubt that, under very favorable circumstances, it would be so with objects sixty feet in height. On its surface were craters of extinct volcanoes, rocks, and masses of stones almost innumerable. He had no doubt that if such a building as he was then in were upon the surface of the moon, it would be rendered distinctly visible by these instruments; and that there were no signs of inhabitants such as ours, no vestiges of architecture remain to show that the moon is or ever was inhabited by a race of mortals similar to ourselves. It presented no appearance which could lead to the supposition that it contained anything like the green fields and lovely verdure of this beautiful world of ours. There was no water visible; not a sea or a river, or even the measure of a reservoir for supplying town or factory; all seemed desolate."

ACADEMIES.—An academy never sits in judgment upon originality of genius; a smooth, fair, passable drawing is all that is required of a student; the natural power is taken for granted; and thus the land swarms with those who can copy, but cannot conceive—who can imitate what others have done, but who are unable to produce anything new for others to copy. A better test is wanted—the academy should only admit those who can show something of their own; the proof of poetry lies not in smooth or skillful translations, neither should

the ability to draw well either the Venus or La Apollo give admission to a student.

Our academies take the tone and color of their works from Rome, the fountain-head of classic composition, and seldom seek to give shape and sentiment to matters which would warm a British heart as the works of Greece warmed Grecian hearts of old. A home-born taste is making its way slowly; few of our sculptors seek now to restore the forgotten gods of the heathen to their pedestals; and few of our painters try to charm us with Venus and her girdle, or Calypso and her enchanted cup.—*Life of Wilkie.*

THE "Man of Fancy" in an evening walk with "Mr. Brown" in the Hartz Mountains, shows the said Brown "sights," and Brown reports the same to *Dwight's Musical Journal*. We have only room for the following preliminary passage. Brown says:—

We were speaking of literature and literary men, especially of imaginative writers, when we emerged from the forest into the open space above mentioned. Above us, high up the slope, in the edge of the woods the fires of the charcoal burners were gleaming, and the wreaths of smoke sailed slowly away, half illumined by the moon, like the spectres of Ossian.

"Did we not know by experience," said my companion, "how light and fragile are those smoke wreaths, the eye could certainly never distinguish them from solid and tangible bodies, as they glide away from us into the recesses of the woods. And indeed, did we not know that the brilliant clouds piled up behind the mountains of a summer afternoon are but masses of mist and fog glorified by the sun's transforming touch, how could the eye learn to distinguish them from the snow-crowned peaks of the Alps, glowing or blushing in their eternal solitudes, as the day-god pours his mid-day splendor upon them, or just kisses them by way of morning greeting or evening good night. One is just as real to the eye, is as much a feature in the landscape, as the other. So in that world which is opened to us in books. History gives us scenes, incidents, characters in ponderous tomes, and we exhaust all the resources of the intellect and imagination in our efforts to feel them as real and tangible existences. Yet scenes, incidents, characters, which are created and illumined by genius, like mist wreaths by the sun—which are offspring of the fancy alone—have in our memories and hearts, and that too without effort of ours, as distinct a recognition, and a place as clearly defined.

"Is Henry the Fourth a more real character to you, Brown, than Falstaff? Bayard, the knight without fear and without reproach, more real than Don Quixote? Dr. Johnson than the Bear of Wankfield? Alexander Selkirk, chasing goats on an island in the Pacific, than Crusoe talking with his parrot on one of the Southern West India Islands, over against the mouth of the great river Orinoco?"

I could not deny this.

"Such creations, when once genius has breathed into them the breath of life, are immortal—certainly undying so long as letters remain and human nature is unchanged. The realms of the imagination are peopled with them, their maxims are quoted in every-day life and their wisdom becomes a part of the common stock of our knowledge."

MR. DAVID COX, the water-color painter, is about to receive a pleasant testimonial from his townsmen at Birmingham. A subscription has been raised to purchase a portrait of the artist; and Sir W. Gordon has received a commission to paint it. Mr. Cox is going to Edinburgh for the requisite sittings.—*Athenaeum.*